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Wood for the Fireplace or Stove

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wood for the fireplace or stove



D. HANSON 79

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wood for the fireplace or stove

Larry Helwig
Extension forester

They say firewood warms you twice—when you cut it and when you burn it.

But it may not.

It won't warm you the second time—when it's burned—if you don't season and store it properly. You should be cutting for next year's heating season this year.

efficiency of fireplaces and stoves

Fireplaces allow a large amount of heat to escape up the chimney. Wood burning stoves, although maybe not as attractive as fireplaces, are usually more efficient (see fact sheets 721, 722, 723).

These units need to be where the family gathers—not at the far end of the room and preferably not against a cold outside wall.

And there's a "best time" to use fireplaces or wood stoves. That's after the house has cooled off and you want to bring the heat up fast.

Wood gives off the sudden burst of heat you need in this case. It doesn't matter so much at this point that you can't regulate temperature as you can with furnaces. You simply want heat, and you'll get it. This is the most economical way to use your fireplace or wood stove.

Once the house has been thoroughly warmed, the other kinds of heating units do a better job at regulating the heat.

kinds of wood

The following firewoods are listed in their preferred order: oak, ash, maple, hackberry, pine, spruce, elm (without bark because of Dutch elm disease), cottonwood, and willow. Some minor species are used. Apple wood is considered an excellent firewood.

Softwoods like pine and spruce are most available in the far western part of the state. Hardwoods (ash and cottonwood) are more common in the rest of the state.

Elm is probably the most available wood, because of its losing battle with Dutch elm disease. Be sure not to use or buy elm with the bark still on the wood. It can become the source for Dutch elm disease if it's stored over the warm season.

Be sure to strip off the bark from all leftover elm firewood.

Or buy only enough elm wood for one heating season.

getting the most out of firewood

Burn only wood that has had a chance to dry out.

Splitting the wood while it's still green will speed up drying. Besides, splitting green wood is easier to do now than after it's dried.

Collect the wood about 6 to 12 months before burning and store it in a dry place.

Wood cut from the main trunk (bodywood) has less sapwood than do the branches, and it will give off larger quantities of heat.

A dead standing tree will usually contain about 25% moisture. It can be burned the same season it is cut without too many problems. However, dead wood is often hard to saw.

The best size for pieces ranges from 3 to 5 inches in diameter. Mix small and large pieces together when burning. To "hold" a fire, use the larger pieces.

Burning wet or green wood will make you a nuisance to your close neighbors. Excessive "stinky" smoke will filter into their homes.

You don't get your money's worth burning green or wet wood, either. A good percentage of the heat generated is used to convert

the water to steam. It never heats your home.

Green wood also causes a faster buildup of creosote in the venting system (see fact sheet 724).

buying wood

Wood is measured by cubic feet. The standard measurement is the cord, which contains 128 cu ft of wood.

Firewood is usually cut in 2-ft lengths or less. One cord will be 8 ft long, 8 ft high, and 2 ft wide. Although it occupies 128 cu ft of space, it contains only about 80 cu ft of solid wood fiber. If the wood is already split when purchased, the cord contains even less solid wood fiber.

Wood is often sold by the pickup truck load. Depending upon the size of the truck box, a "full" load will contain a third to a half of a cord.

Try to find out the moisture content of the wood. Wood with more than 40% moisture isn't a good investment if it is to be burned that season. Rotting or "punky" wood is not a good buy.

There is just no easy way to check for moisture content. You have to go by how long the wood's been cut. Loose bark indicates a tree has been dead for some time and could be burned that heating season.

Pound for pound, all woods give about the same amount of heat. Ten pounds of cottonwood give off about as much heat as 10 lb of ash wood. However, because it weighs less, a cord of cottonwood gives about two thirds the heat of the more dense ash wood.

factors affecting price

There will be a wide range of firewood prices, depending on supply and demand, hauling distances, stacking requirements

at delivery point, the species of wood, and whether the wood is split or round and green or seasoned.

Oak and ash are premium firewoods. Apple wood, because of its aroma, also brings high prices.

"For sale" ads show a cord of delivered ash wood can be from \$70 to \$125. But don't buy before you know if the wood's in the length you desire, if it will be stacked in a spot you designate, whether or not it has been split, and when it was cut.

Wood may sometimes be gotten just for the asking. Dumping grounds, city forestry departments, shelterbelt clean-ups, and powerline or road right-of-way clearings are some places to seek out wood.

Ratings for fireplace wood

		Relative amt. of heat	Easy to ignite?	Easy to split?	Does it have heavy smoke?	Does it pop or throw sparks?	General rating and remarks
hardwood	ash, oak, birch, hickory, hard maple	high	yes	yes	no	no	excellent
	soft maple, cherry	medium	yes	yes	no	no	good
	elm, hackberry	medium	medium	no	medium	no	fair; contains too much water when green
	basswood, aspen, willow, cottonwood, or other poplars	low	yes	yes	medium	no	fair; but good for kindling
softwood	eastern red- cedar, Rocky Mt. juniper, pine	medium	yes	yes	medium	yes	good; excellent for kindling

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